The Hair Down There: Untangling Pubic Hair Politics

Kristen C. Blinne

Warning Graphic Content: *This commentary is a tongue-and-cheek exploration of pubic hair styling practices, aiming to open up a conversation with readers about this topic. In doing so, I actively imagine [picture a person day-dreaming here] and question a variety of reasons as to why some women might also choose to engage in this practice, further implicating my own complicity in removing pubic hair in this performative text. Though I consider this essay a commentary, not grounded in any specific research study, and one that firmly rejects a specific methodological stance or the need to religiously cite a plethora of scholarly voices as the primary source of credible evidence (so that academic readers might uncover some magical exemplars to rigorously analyze and critique, aka attempt to disqualify my claims) by needing research to function as some kind of truth claim, versus a search for understanding, instead I invite readers to relax, have a glass of wine, smile, and perhaps even attempt to be entertained and challenged by this hopefully playful-yet-critical and intentionally conversational rambling about pubic hair, not arriving at any specific end-all,- is-all, or-be-all place.*

I would be doing a disservice to the research I have conducted on this topic, however, by not calling attention to the work I have completed, including a 100 person qualitative survey on pubic hair styling preferences, a 700 person mixed-methodology survey on attitudes regarding body hair removal/non-removal, and hundreds of hours of interviews and observations at hair removal studios. Additionally, as a licensed hair removal specialist, I would also be remiss not to honor the voices of hundreds of clients I have encountered who have shared their stories and revealed their bodies to me. Thus, in celebration of these experiences, my goal is not to argue for or against pubic styling but to contribute to the conversation by recognizing the diversity of practices and meanings assigned to why someone may or may not choose to remove or style pubic hair; why not prescribing labels and judgment about idealized bodies matters for those who do remove their hair; and how every voice in this conversation is important, regardless of the level of agreement or disagreement you have with each person's position.

If my traditional structure causes you discomfort in the process, I ask that you do three things my mentor and dear friend, Mariaelena Bartesaghi (2013), *taught me: not "to ask questions to which we already (think you) know the answers," meaning that questions should be able to carry us into unexpected places and be open, tentative, and able to be questioned. Next, "be humble"; as learners and researchers, we are not experts but co-seekers and our presence in each other's lives is always an intervention, insomuch that, "instead of generalizability, we should strive to "look for complexity, for dilemmas, for analyses that help us, as well as those we study, reflect about the ways in which they journey through this life as human beings." Thus, I invite you to live in a world of questions with me versus succumbing to the need to find answers to this blatantly open-ended pubic hair proposition. Finally, and worth quoting her words at length, is the importance of trust: "There is research that is not practical and may not lead to knowing how to do things in a more interesting or new way. But if the researcher's questions are sincere and if she is willing to be humble, then the premise of trust is what makes all the difference: in conversation, the objective is to trust that we know how to keep the conversation going" (p. 111).*

So, please, ask questions, be humble, and trust that I want to continue this conversation and need your help to do so. But first…

I would like to make a confession: *I sometimes remove my pubic hair.* Shocking, I know. Wait, wait, wait...before I continue, I should tell you more about myself: I am a white (though I prefer bisque), thirty-something, middle-class, Midwestern-American female; thus, my experiences with body hair removal are grounded within these multiple subjectivities. My positionality aside, while I want to believe that some collective panopticonic cultural entity is standing over my shoulder (or is it I?) pleasurably watching me laboriously shave my privates, I have learned over the years that I really enjoy the feeling of shaved skin, both on others and myself. Do I lack critical consciousness[1] because I find my skin to be more sensitive once the hair is removed? Clearly, I must be a cultural dupe to "buy in" to such historically-situated-culturally-specific-contextual nonsense. Am I buying in? Selling out? Or could it be as simple as just preferring *not* to have hair "down there"?

To ease my stress about this topic, I want to have a conversation with you about pubic hair styling: why it is important to think and talk about, why some people might engage in this practice, and how we can (re)evaluate how this practice has been framed so that we[2] can continue to critically, creatively, and consciously discuss this topic, while still leaving room for varied perspectives and approaches to this practice. Not so secretly, I want to perform a pubic relations[3] intervention - right here, right now.

To consider this further, I turned to Philips Norelco's[4] experts, more than willing to help me reflect on this issue through their online quiz, "How bold are you?" Comprised of four questions, this quiz asks the following: 1.) When you're at home alone, you prefer to be (wearing sweats and fuzzy slippers, glamorous in lacy lingerie, or getting ready to go out); 2.) Your favorite way to watch TV is (alone and cozy in pajamas, with a friend or two, sitting next to your leading man); 3.) Your favorite meal is (cereal at your kitchen counter, a juicy steak and a great merlot at a hip restaurant, a hot date is more important than hot food!); and finally, 4.) Your idea of a great Saturday is (catching up on things you didn't have time for during the week, brunch with friends, whatever- I can recover on Sunday!). Hmmmmm. I wonder which bikini style suits my personality?

Okay, now for the results. Shit. I am "a bold-fashioned girl." According to Philips, if you prefer to wear sweatpants, watch television alone, eat cereal at the kitchen counter, and catch up on work on a Saturday night, this means that you are *not* likely to invest in fully removing your pubic hair. With all of that time alone, why bother, right? So, a "bold-fashioned girl" is a "traditionalist" that keeps her hair "well-kempt" and trimmed, though I doubt, based on their description of this seemingly lonely character, that this person would bother being "well-kempt" and trimmed. But wait, I am falling into the same stereotypical black hole as they are, right? I am sure you can see, based on their logic, how wearing lacy lingerie, eating steak, and partying on Saturday night might suggest to them that you are willing to bare-all to attain their "viva la diva" status. Enter: heteronormative gender

stereotyping *par excellence*. Now...wait for it...a counter narrative by Armstrong (2010, emphasis in original) for *Siren's Magazine*:

> **For every Brazilian you get, another woman might feel more pressured to do so. Symbolically speaking, you're not alone on that salon table, with your ankles up around your ears as you exhale with each rip of the wax strip. And that takes sisterhood to a whole new level. That's what makes waxing such a slippery-slope of a feminist question—it's *never* going to be a feminist act, but, should you decide to get one, you need to ask yourself some tough questions to make your salon visit at least a *little* kinder to the sisterhood.**

Okay, I get it. Um, now, I have - I have failed the sisterhood. I am a cultural dupe again, lacking agency,[5] especially in relationship to beauty regimes. For a minute, I thought I was onto something because I had resisted the lure of Philips' typecasting by critically and consciously - even agentically - being a fully-waxed-stay-at-home-alone-sweatpants-wearing-academic-who-is-too-busy-writing-this-paper-to-go-out-on-a-Saturday-night-feminist.
Damn, this is getting confusing. I mean, who decides which acts are feminist and which are not or when I am an agent or when I am not? Perhaps it would be more appropriate for me to say I am a partially-shaved-stay-at-home-alone-sweat-pants-wearing-academic-who-is-too-busy-writing-this-paper-to-go-out-on-a-Saturday-night-person-who-advocates-feminism-because-I-failed-the-sisterhood-due-to-shaving-my-pubic-hair. Whew, that was exhausting. But wait…I think Armstrong's statement does precisely the same as advertisements attempt to do: remind women [and men] that the body choices they make somehow do not "measure up" to the proposed ideal, whether it is removal or non-removal of body hair. Same, same, but not so different, ultimately.

So, neither Philips nor *Sirens Magazine* was helpful in my quest to better understand why I *sometimes* remove my pubic hair. Maybe can help me. Well, this is intriguing: In 2001, Labre conducted a web search with the term, "Brazilian wax," which yielded 133 hits. I conducted the same search on yahoo, December 15, 2006, and yielded 274,000 hits, and again, August 2, 2007, which yielded 1,710,000 hits. As of November 23, 2011, a yahoo search of the term "Brazilian wax" yielded 52,500,000 results. On January 19, 2015 the same exact search yielded 1,120,000 results. You do the math, but these figures suggest to me that the "Brazilian wax" might have gained in popularity within the last ten to fifteen years. In 2015, however, you may notice the number of hits has declined considerably since 2011. What do you make of this? Has this become a "normative" practice that people are no longer searching because they are already "doing it" or was it just a passing trend or a short-lived phase in a world of body modification practices?

I have another confession: *I first removed my pubic hair when I was fifteen.* Shocking, I know, since it was 1993. I mean, hell, *Playboy* did not even show a completely bare

photograph in its magazine until 2001 when it featured playmate Dalene Kurtis without pubic hair. For me, after removing said hair, what started as soft, sensitive skin quickly gave way to the awkward, itchy re-growth period, leading me to believe I would not be integrating this practice into my daily or weekly grooming routine anytime soon. When I was a teenager, pubic hair removal was cast into the role of "naughty," not "nice." If you ask teens[6] today, conversely, I suspect you will get a completely different perspective, suggesting not naughty or nice but *normal.* But what is “normal” anyway?

Some years later, in my early twenties, I trained to become an esthetician (skin care therapist), primarily focusing on body hair removal. I happened upon this training around 2000 when pubic hair removal was beginning to be an extremely sought-after service in salons and spas. I learned the intricacies of pubic hair removal and styling practices, including waxing, sugaring, trimming, and shaping. An aside: I once heard another professional say that her clients often state that getting on their hands and knees in the "all fours" position does not feel dignified. Her response: "I am waxing your ass now- would you like your dignity or would you like your ass waxed because in my world, you can't have both." Back to the point: My training was aimed at increasing my technical expertise and proficiency in myriad removal styles. At that time, I discovered I preferred having my pubic hair completely removed, but it was not a practice I engaged in regularly, going through cycles and phases that shifted with the seasons and relationship patterns, as well my preferences in the moment.

When I began graduate studies in medical anthropology (and later communication), I started to consider the culture of body hair removal in the United States, a topic of concern and interest due to my professional spa training and background. I devoured all of the writing I could find on the subject, which in the social sciences and humanities was quite minimal. Ultimately, in my thesis, I decided to give Terry Eagleton (2003) the metaphorical finger for his statement,

> **Not all students are blind to the Western narcissism involved in working on the history of pubic hair while half the world's population lacks adequate sanitation and survives on less than two dollars a day (p. 6).**

An important parallel can perhaps be drawn between Eagleton's argument and Carol Vance's discussion surrounding the pleasure/danger dichotomy,[7] which positions topics as "worthy" only when properly focused on non-pleasurable, "concrete, material, and life-saving" issues. His statement, like so many others I have heard while dancing down this perilous path, inspired me to dedicate the next years of my life to the pursuit of pubic relations’ knowledge, unlike Eagleton’s urging others to consider the study of pubic hair as irrelevant when compared to current world affairs.

Considering this further, hair occupies a unique position in/on/through the body as it transgresses our biological bodies’ corporeal boundaries and can be considered our most superficial structure. Hair lives in the in-between zones of our being. In one respect, it is rooted in the mysterious expanses of our interiority, yet it bridges through the skin and

extends outward into the world. It occupies the margins of our body, and while attached, it is part of our being. Hair is in transition; it is always in a state of becoming; therefore, it is seen as a source of pleasure, danger, or power. No wonder this tiny, yet pervasive entity causes so much trouble!

Building on this, if we were to read pubic hair as entangled with ideas and perceptions surrounding gender, sexuality, health, politics, and consumerism, the history of pubic hair would indeed be a more important area of inquiry for scholars to consider. From visiting a spa for pubic hair removal or styling (Brazilian waxing or other pubic hair service); purchasing a razor (gendered through design, coloring, and advertising); or viewing images of hairless bodies (in art, fashion, pornography, and other forms of media), the history of pubic hair (and its styling and removal) enters into the realm of gendered histories of consumption, product production, marketing, and advertising, fashion and clothing trends, pornography, and body modification practices.

However, in reading about attitudes and practices relating to body hair removal, I continue to have difficulty identifying myself within these discourses, which seem to be critical analyses of hair removal (telling me not to do it); popular culture's how to remove body hair articles (telling me I need to do it); and product advertising and manufacturing (telling me what to buy and how to do it). These competing discourses, once embodied, practiced, and repeated, uniquely invest pubic hair with a range of symbolic meanings, storied and played out in our everyday lives in what we do and how we talk about this doing.

***

The minute I report I am interested in pubic hair, the puzzled or horrified looks, giggling, or shocking statements abound. *Pubic hair.* Yes, that same hair that you find on soap, in hotel beds, bathrooms, or even in one's mouth in not-so-uncommon interpersonal moments. It is a dark and coarse topic, private and public, painful and pleasurable - and definitely controversial. I have also encountered a wide variety of reviewers, colleagues, and people off the street, commenting to me:

"A woman would only ever do this for a man."

"Men do not do this."

"No lesbians remove their pubic hair."

"This is only done by the younger generation."

"Guys who like this are pedophiles."

"Women who remove their hair are just trying to look prepubescent."

And so on…

As an aside: at a recent conference during a poster presentation, I turned my space into a "design your own pubic style" craft station, which included educational images I drew of varying pubic hair styles. Interestingly, the majority of visitors to my booth sought consultation on their own pubic styling needs versus discussing the social constructions surrounding the practice (the subject of my paper). Did my wearing a white coat encourage their enthusiasm?

Photo credit: Christopher J. Patti

Let's take a closer look and you decide:

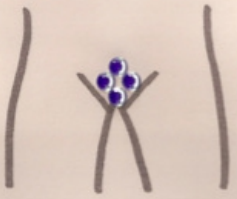
(1) "Natural"

No trimming or removal. Pubic hair distribution patterns, textures, colors, and length will vary from person to person.

(2) Trimmed

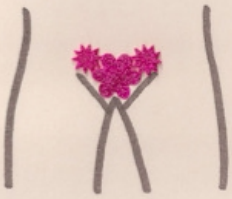
Pubic hair length is shortened with scissors or clippers, but not shaped or removed.

(3) Embellished,
(Vajazzle, Bikini Graffiti, Bikini Bling)



Crystals and stick on jewelry is applied to skin, temporary tattoos, henna designs, glitter, ribbons, piercings among other embellishments.

(4) Bleached or Dyed



Hair coloring is used to match head hair or create a new color. Bleaching products lighten hair to desired color.

(5) Shaped
(Heart Shaped Box, Flare-do®, Pubic Art & Sculpture)

Hair is trimmed or removed (waxing, sugaring, shaving, laser, or other technique) into shapes like hearts, arrows, initials, triangle, strips, leaves, among other designs.

(6) Bikini/Brief Line
(Standard, Regular, or Basic Bikini)

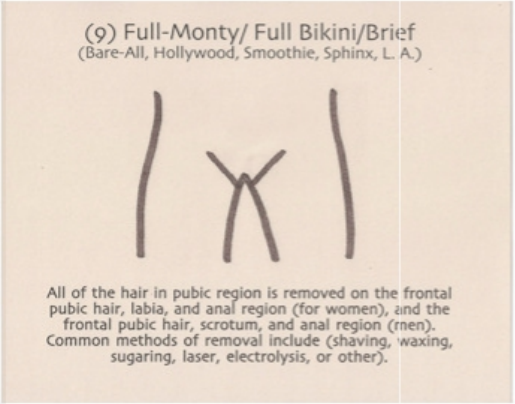
Hair is removed around the top and sides of the bikini or underwear line. May also include hair removal on thigh. Common methods of removal include (shaving, waxing, sugaring, laser, electrolysis, or other).

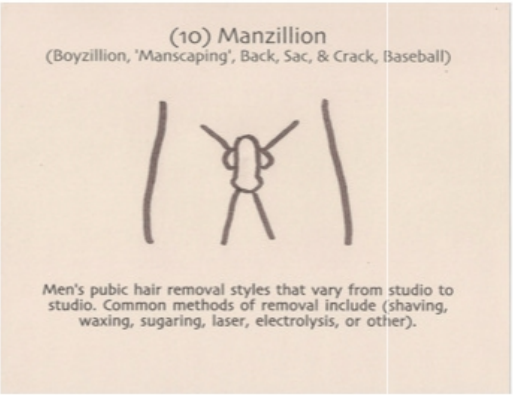
(7) Extended Bikini/Brief Line
(French Bikini or Triangle)

Hair is removed from the sides to form a triangle shape and goes beyond the traditional bikini line. Common methods of removal include (shaving, waxing, sugaring, laser, electrolysis, or other).

(8) Brazilian Wax
(Landing Strip, Playboy, Thong Wax, C-Wax)

Up to a medium width vertical strip or small triangle is left in the frontal pubic area. All hair is removed from labia and anal area. Common methods of removal include (shaving, waxing, sugaring, laser, electrolysis, or other).





In fact, this same presentation highly alarmed one of my colleagues, inspiring her to write me the following email:

> *I have to admit that your presentation topic took me aback. I really had no clue -- although what did I think women who wear bikinis did to get that sleek look? All I could think about was the unnecessary (to me, anyway) shaving of the area when I had my first child (1971, Southern California) and how just two years later that was deemed barbaric and a ploy by male doctors to subjugate their female patients.*
>
> *My second thought was to feel so, so sorry for the young women who do this to themselves for whatever reason -- have we learned nothing since the whole women's lib movement? Maybe I never felt the need to be "liberated" -- I always kind of did my own thing anyway (hence being in graduate school at my age) -- and so didn't pay much attention. I don't wear makeup, either*
> *-- an occasional swipe of lipstick being my sole concession to aging pale-face syndrome. Anyway, thank you for exploring this.*

Yes, my friends, it is a pickle. But why is this so? My canned response would be this: Historically, body hair has been perceived and theorized as a visible guide to the "sexes" - but also, a marker of class and race - holding that male and female bodies differ less in the possession of unwanted hair but more in their attitudes and practices related to its absence or presence (Hope, 1982; Ferrante, 1988; Herzig, 1999, 2000; Kitzinger and Willmott, 2002; Hansen, 2007). What is considered superfluous[8] or unnecessary body hair is based on one's politics of location, varying from culture to culture and within subcultures, all historically situated in a specific time and/or place.

As the yahoo searches suggest, in the last decade,[9] pubic hair removal is receiving increased media attention, creating an entire new industry of products, services, professionals, and vocabulary to support this shift. Pubic hair styling is regularly featured in print magazines, television, and films and has become an integral part of popular culture in everyday practice and conversation. With the growing trend in hairless bodies, Hollywood celebrities have touted the benefits of "going bare down there" with endorsements by

Gwyneth Paltrow, Kirstie Alley, Naomi Campbell, and Eva Longoria, with media excitement surrounding photographs of the waxed genitals of Lindsay Lohan, Britney Spears, Béyonce Knowles, and Paris Hilton.

In fact, nothing has been cited more by individuals (read almost any pop culture article on the topic to verify this) in bringing awareness to Brazilian waxing than HBO's[10] hit television series *Sex and the City*. Brazilian waxing was featured in a two-part episode in season three of *Sex and the City*, featuring the four main characters vacationing in Los Angeles.[11] Carrie (Sarah Jessica Parker) makes an appointment with a celebrity bikini waxer who gives her a Brazilian wax instead of a standard bikini wax, which leaves Carry feeling like a "hairless dog," who has been "mugged" of her pubic hair. After the initial shock of her newly found hairless genitals, Carry decides she likes the look, and the new awareness of "down there" makes her feel like "walking sex." After a one-night stand with a man she meets at a party, Carrie blames the new wax for her behavior. Samantha (Kim Cattrall), who previously warns Carrie that a Brazilian wax can make you "do crazy things," later recommends to Charlotte (played by Kristin Davis) that a trip to "Brazil" might help her sexual difficulties with her husband. *Sex and the City* also featured episodes with pubic hair dyeing and shaping.

In 2008, when the movie *Sex and the City* came out, pubic hair removal was framed by the characters as a practice that was expected or required. In a scene where the main characters are lounging outside in bathing suits, Samantha chides Miranda because her pubic hair is not contained within her swimwear. Humiliated, Miranda covers herself with a towel and leaves - a clear shift in media representation. What started as a novel way to spice up Carry's sex life later gives way to Miranda's being shamed for not "keeping up" her removal routine. This shift is happening (or perhaps already happened) right now can you see-feel-taste-hear-smell it?

Historically, there appears to be a direct correlation between body hair removal practices and bodily display through various fashion trends (Hansen, 2007; Hildebrandt, 2003; Hope, 1988). Skin that is publicly exposed becomes a target for hair removal practices; however, it is interesting to note that one of the most visibly hairy parts of the body is the forearm, an area that is generally ignored in mainstream American hair removal practices. Taking another trip down memory lane, pubic hair in the 1970s was mostly depicted in its unaltered form in much of pornography, but by the mid-1990s, it was being trimmed, waxed, removed, shaped, and dyed in the majority of pornographic images. By shaving or trimming pubic hair, magazines like *Hustler, Penthouse,* and *Playboy* went "pink," so to speak, able to show more explicit photographs of the labia majora (Kipnis, 1992; Landrum, 2004).

It is easy to see that pubic hair removal has been a major part of the rise of what Brian McNair (2002) calls the "porno-chic"[12] movement. With porn becoming "sexy" in the 1990s, "porno-chic" integrated easily into television, film, and print media as a fashionable commodity. Hildebrandt (2003) calls attention to an important aspect often overlooked in discussions surrounding pubic hair styling and removal, the bikini, stating, "Indeed, the term 'bikini line' itself suggests that the removal of this hair is related to the introduction of the bikini to the United States in 1946" (p. 61). So, we have bikinis, micro-bikinis, low-rider

jeans, thongs, *Sex and the City*, "porno-chic" all pushing us towards pubic hair styling as an "up for it" kind of sexual self fashioning (Attwood, 2005, 2006).

A discussion about the rising popularity of genital waxing in the United States would not be complete without introducing the J Sisters. These seven sisters,[13] of the J Sisters International Salon in Manhattan, are often credited as being the stylists who introduced the now famous Brazilian wax[14] in 1987. According to Jonice,[15] "When we first introduced our signature Brazilian bikini wax in 1994, we had no idea how it would be received. In Brazil, with bikinis so small, waxing is part of our culture." Other skin care professionals also removed pubic hair in various styles prior to the J Sisters' now famous import; however, the J Sisters have been cited as putting the term "Brazilian wax" on the United States map.

***

Balancing with one leg on a folding chair, I tentatively sigh before pulling the hard wax off of my taut, powdered skin. Like pulling off bandages, the anticipation of pain is often greater than the act. I am always frightened at the prospect that the wax will be the wrong temperature (either too hot or cold), that it may stick to the skin and not come off with hot water or oil, or that when pulling, it will flake and have to be cut out or picked off. Facing the mirror, I close my eyes and pull, trying to remain mindful of my body positioning as the wax removes each tiny hair from the root. Aoooooouuuuuuuuuuuuuu! I would be lying if I said that hair removal is not painful.

Once completed, I rapidly run through the cost/benefit analysis of having painstakingly removed the hair from "down there." In my list, I discover that I am more invested in the weeks of soft, smooth, tactilely rich skin, than I am in the twenty minutes of procedural discomfort. It appears that I am not alone in this preference and that many others share this thinking; however, I also hear a variety of voices shouting at me for "failing the sisterhood." Closing my eyes, I picture:

> Germaine Greer (1970) scornfully reminding me that, "If they [women] do not feel sufficient revulsion for their body hair themselves, others will direct them to depilate themselves. In extreme cases, women shave or pluck their pubic area, so as to seem even more sexless and infantile" (p. 38).
>
> *or*
>
> Susan Brownmiller (1984), informing me that total genital depilation is similar to more serious measures like cliterectomy as a means of taming female sexuality.
>
> *or*
>
> Wendy Chapkis (1986) asserting that in order for women to pass under the guise of acceptable femininity, they must transform themselves through beauty practices from female – feminine, and in doing so, hide their "tools of transformation."

or

Magdala Labre (2002) claiming that, "While women are provided with a myriad of options regarding hair removal products and techniques, one fundamental choice is not available to them -- the choice *not* to remove their body hair" (p. 127).

or

Ruth Barcan (2004) arguing that depilation is a form of "enforced domestication."

or

My personal favorite, Sheila Jeffreys (2005),[16] who asserts that, "Many men prefer women to look prepubescent and thus hairless. Men are trained by porn to see hairlessness in women as 'natural' and to find the hairiness of girlfriends distasteful and less exciting" (p. 79).

or

Lesnik-Oberstein (2006), concluding that body hair is "madness asserting its right to presence," having been "denied the barest possibility of speech or meaning" (p. 10-11).

In all of these examples, certain similarities persist, suggesting that pubic hair [and body hair in general] removal is a waste of time, money, and energy, a repetitive and constant practice, cast into the realm of Foucault's (1997) *Discipline and Punish,* or rather reconsidered as a form of *Depilation and Punishment,* rendering hairless bodies into "docile bodies" transformed through disciplinary power. These statements also suggest that this practice fragments and commodifies women's bodies, serving to render them childlike, inferior, submissive, and dependent on men, and patriarchy in general. Further, these authors assert that women embody the male gaze and, as such, would not likely engage in pubic hair removal for their own reasons - the suggestion being that removal is always to please a partner. As someone who does not remove pubic hair for a partner, I find these generalizations dangerous.

Additionally, it is quite obvious that pubic hair removal, in particular, is so heavily linked to sexuality that many associate this practice with pedophilia, as it is thought to provide the fantasy of engaging in sex with prepubescent girls (or boys?). As Labre (2002) states,

By associating female sexual attractiveness with the visual characteristics of girls' genital areas, this procedure may contribute to the sexual objectification of girls. In addition, the removal of

> **body hair from women's genital area also seems to provide support of the construction of women as childlike (p. 125).**

She boldly goes on to assert that, "By rendering women childlike, the Brazilian wax can be viewed as supporting the submissiveness, inferiority, and dependence on men" (Labre, 2002, p. 125). These statements completely ignore the fact that many women (and men) engage in genital depilation outside of the confines of heteronormative relationships. Further, does the practice of male genital depilation also serve to render men as childlike? Does a woman who is more attracted to a man who removes pubic hair also become guilty of pedophilic leanings and the objectification of boys, I wonder.

Linked with adult identity, pubic hair *is* considered part of an individual's sexual maturation process; for some, it may symbolize one's "womanhood" or "manhood" perhaps better articulated in gender-neutral terms as "adulthood." What of individuals, however, who have very little or no pubic hair? Does this indicate that they are less adult because social constructions related to pubic hair removal suggest that hairlessness is likened to being in a child-like state? Does more pubic hair suggest that one is more adult? Because American society is so youth-oriented, regarding beauty ideals, the desire to appear "youthful" is something many people try to project by engaging in various grooming and appearance-related practices.

These authors also suggest that pubic hair styling creates a situation where women's bodies are labeled as unattractive or unacceptable "as is" and in need of modification, which further limits their ability to exercise agency or have critical consciousness as body hair removal becomes a practice about which women constantly monitor themselves, while being socialized to find body hair, especially dark hair, disgusting. By normalizing this disgust, these same women become enforcers of hairlessness (or conversely, hair retention) norms, and thus, body hair, specifically pubic hair, would appear to be just another area of concern - another area in which to feel unhappy. But is this really the reality of the situation? I hear other voices refuting this thinking:

> Carol Vance (1992) reminds me that, "Feminism should support women's experiments and analyses, encouraging the acquisition of knowledge. We can begin by examining our own experience, sharing it with each other, knowing that in sexuality as in the rest of social life, our adventures, risks, impulses, and terrors provide clues to the future" (p. 24).
>
> *and*
>
> Elizabeth Grosz (1994) reassures me that there is "A plural, multiple field of possible body 'types', no one of which functions as the delegate or representative of the others, must be created, a 'field' of body types - young and old., black and white, male and female, animal and human, inanimate and animate - which, in being recognized in

their specificity, cannot take the coercive or singular norm or ideals of all others. Such plural models must be used to define norms and ideals not only of health and fitness but also beauty and desire" (p. 22).

and

Lesley Sharp (2000) who reminds me that, "Any attempt to universalize the body is thus impossibly flawed, driven inevitably by idealized and ethnocentric definitions of beauty, shape, size, mobility, etc." (p. 313).

and

McNair (2002) who supports my thoughts by stating, "we inhabit a world of plural sexualities and polymorphous perversities, and that this diversity of sexual identities exists alongside many other elements of modern life which are far removed from the 'natural' human state as it may have been in some distant prehistorical past, but which we value and preserve nonetheless as taken for granted elements of contemporary life" (p. 4).

and

Ken Plummer (1993) who helps me seek spaces of harmony by opining, "If only we would accept that we live in an immeasurably aporetic and contradictory world, where voices will never really agree, where significant - at times even enormous - differences will (and should) forever remain. And yet without some slender threads of the universal to bind us together, however, loosely, we may be doomed" (p. 144).

and

Judith Butler (2004) who inspires me to ask, "what it might mean to undo restrictively normative conceptions of sexual and gendered life?" (p. 1).

and

Holland and Attwood (2009) who urge me to consider, "While it is important to remain critical of the new way sexualized practices for women are developing, it is equally important not to dismiss them out of hand if we are genuinely interested in working out what an active and empowered female sexuality might look and feel and really be like" (p. 181).

I thus question how we account for shifting viewpoints regarding body hair removal practices. Why are men or "male bodies" generally absent from discussions on body hair

removal? In my experience few writings related to body hair seem to take into account individuals' sensorial, spatial, or embodied understandings. Moreover, even fewer writings on body hair removal make clear the author's stake in the argument or the author's personal body hair practices. Often, in these writings, the author's body is hidden by ideological moves and theories of other women's (and men's) bodies. Please understand that my goal here is not to argue that more "choice" is better, nor do I intend not to take seriously the compulsory hair removal norms dictated by a largely patriarchal culture. What I hope, instead, is that we can move this debate outside of discussions surrounding female agency (or lack of) and firmly place this conversation into a new framework that recognizes the tension many women face between how they understand and communicate about their everyday practices and the contemporary, cultural conditions that both constrain and facilitate these options. I firmly support the need to critique the limited range of appropriate body/beauty ideals available for women within the discourses of fashion and consumer culture, pornography, and media representations, but also contend that we need to ground these critiques within everyday, lived bodily practices.

It is also outside of the scope of this commentary to fully illuminate the social consequences of challenging these body hair norms, in addition to presenting a historical account of hair removal across cultures, disciplines, genders, or body parts. Further, I do not seek to situate this discussion within other body practices such as cosmetic surgery, dieting, or other body modification practices or within previous debates about pornography (e.g. sex wars), the sex-positive movement, or within postfeminism, anti-feminism, or postmodern perspectives on this topic. I consider this paper a conversation, questioning how we communicate about this topic as a way to problematize authors who fail to make clear their own practices and positionality, who oversimplify their arguments by falling into a "good/bad" dichotomy of acceptable bodily practices, while leaving out individual narratives surrounding relational experiences of a body with hair. In hoping to move this debate into new territory, I am not attempting to merely reproduce an "I do it, so I like it, and it is okay," space. Instead, I hope that it becomes apparent that through communication, we construct the worlds in which we are a part. Starting with my own experience, I suggest that we talk more with people about body hair as a way to better understand the pressures, tensions, contradictions, experiences, preferences, and meanings they apply to the removal or non-removal practices in which they engage so we can better see how communication by, for, and about women limits, shapes, and impacts their everyday lives.

It seems clear to me that body hair, whether removed or not, constitutes a voluntary practice of body modification, existing somewhere between being culturally imposed on individuals and being actively sought. By choosing to remove body hair, individuals are participating in the production of culturally appropriate bodies, based on gendered hairlessness norms perpetuated in America. There is no doubt that to opt out of hair removal in certain areas (for example, women's underarm hair) may mark the person as non-conforming or as inappropriate to societies' gender norms.

What is also clear is that, more and more, the body has become a project that is worked on and created as part of an individual's self-identity. "Recognizing that the body has

become a project for many modern persons entails accepting that its appearance, size, shape and even its contents, are potentially open to reconstruction in line with the designs of its owner" (Shilling, 2003, p. 4). By engaging in a variety of body projects or self- care regimes like hair removal, individuals are constantly evaluating their appearance and state of bodily health. A plethora of products and services are employed to help people achieve the desired bodily state. This investment in the body, as well as socio-culturally-defined structures of masculinity[17] and femininity, becomes a form of expression in which ideals are engaged to create and maintain an individual's body image. It can also be said that women's removal of body hair further serves to amplify difference and create hairlessness as a symbol of femininity.

In order to open up space for conversation about pubic hair styling practices, however, we must first acknowledge the options of resistance and/or critical consciousness, while still being critical of the role pornography, consumer culture, fashion, and the intersections of race/ethnicity, class, gender, age, religion, occupation, as well as a variety of other factors, play in shaping these practices. In doing so, we must also recognize the embodied, relational aspects of hair removal practices to include a variety of bodies and shifting preferences - including non-white, non-heterosexual, non-gender defining bodies of varying ages- within this discussion.

***

Personally, I think that there are myriad reasons why people might engage in pubic hair styling practices, so here is a list of my thoughts (I hope you will add to this, too). While I do not consider this an exhaustive list, I can imagine that a variety of these factors are relevant to some people's motivation in removing or retaining both visible and non-visible body hair. In reading through this list, I anticipate that many of you may feel anxious at my obvious lack of references to specific body hair research studies that might *validate* my *speculations* here. Fear not, I've got you covered.[18] If after reading that note, you are still uncomfortable, I ask that you please try not to take this exercise too seriously. While it is serious, my goal here is to postulate, through my years of work in the field and personal and professional research (though I am not fully embracing an expert stance), the value I bring to this conversation through my own knowledge and experience and see it as worthy of presentation here, offering my best scholarly high-five to those who have also found that people *might* remove their hair for any of the following reasons:

Whew, now that we have that out of the way: I would like to start with the premise that removal practices are grounded within specific historical moments and time periods, based on what is currently fashionable, considered hygienic, or health-giving/illness-reducing. Removal practices go in and out of style, according to demand, interest, experience, and cultural setting. Each culture has a prescribed set of body/ beauty ideals and standards in current and constant circulation. These ideas and images play a role in individuals' decisions to conform or resist these dominant ideals, a factor in further breaking cultural norms into sub-cultural practices.

Further, pubic hair modification has existed in cultures around the world from early to modern times, traced to ancient Egypt and practiced by both men and women. Moreover, the presence or absence of pubic hair, with its long history in art and sculpture, has been an integral component in the history of pornography.[19] Whether pubic hair is regarded as a form of covering or exposure depends on the context and the audience. Many theories abound as to why human beings have pubic hair, yet there is no accepted definitive answer. Some of the most popular theories assert that it serves as a form of protection (providing a cushion from friction, keeping genitals warm, and reducing infection by keeping dirt and foreign substances away from orifices); attraction (due to sexually stimulating odors or pheromones, which trap scent; and aesthetic*s* (a visual signal of sexual maturity). Pubic hair exists in an extraordinary variety, from various lengths (long to short); colors (blonde to black); textures (fine to coarse); styles (straight to curly); distributions (pubic triangle to thighs); and amounts (sparse to dense).

It seems silly to me to think that pubic hair removal has not been practiced throughout humanity's history across cultures and time periods. It is a social construction through and through. Because hair exists in-between our inner and outer selves, it is one of our only features that extends into the social space of the other; thus, it can easily become a source of disgust and/or desire that fascinates, horrifies, pleases, and delights the senses, aesthetically beautiful or ugly, depending on the context in which it is situated. To this end, body hair, especially pubic hair, is always relational and meanings are created in and out of social interactions, thereby influencing our experiences and perceptions of our bodies. Regardless of whether it is a source of *disgust* or *desire*, pubic hair removal and styling seems to be changing the landscape of the body (both literally and figuratively), as well as people's perceptions of others, based on their removal or non-removal practices.

Building on this, we encounter certain religions that ascribe spiritual meaning to head, body, and pubic hair, and, as a result, have highly specific ideas related to hair removal or retention. The type of faith/ tradition and devotion to said faith/ tradition will also impact the likelihood of engaging in the hair removal practices dictated by these rules, rituals, or scriptures. Let's also not pretend that the "pubic is not political," in that body hair, and hair in general, constitutes a part of most individuals' identities and how they chose to style, remove, or not remove their hair can symbolize various political agendas and even serve as a form of protest to dominant ideals.

Okay, so we have culture, history, religion/spirituality, and politics influencing or impacting our removal decisions, but what about other factors? I can certainly attest to the idea that body hair and pubic hair styling practices are generationally-situated and often shift across an individual's life span. How someone approaches their body hair as a teenager, young adult, adult, middle-aged adult, and older adult are likely to be quite different. Because body hair changes throughout one's lifespan, it is likely that body hair removal practices will change as well. This is also relationally constructed, insomuch that removal may only take place when one is in an intimate relationship, but this is not always the case. One might discontinue removal in the relationship (or as a strategy to end a relationship). Further, removal decisions may be influenced by whom one encounters (partner, doctor, friend, family

member, stranger, professional, and so on). Moreover, removal may shift from relationship to relationship, following no specific pattern. Many individuals also have strong preferences for how they maintain or alter their body and pubic hair and a preference for partners as well. Though many people are also ambivalent or neutral on the subject, preference is a major consideration in one's decision to remove or retain their pubic hair in a certain way.

I can also imagine that for some, removal may revolve around fitness or athletic activities, such as swimming or going to the beach, further influenced by swimwear or sportswear choices. For others, time might play an important role in decisions to engage in pubic hair styling, as the amount of time styling takes will be a consideration in one's decision to style or alter pubic hair. Yet, again, the body as a landscape might also influence removal decisions. One person (male, female, or other gender label) might retain all body hair but remove pubic hair. In an opposite example, an individual might remove all body hair and retain pubic hair. Additionally, employment or job-related requirements sometimes dictate certain hairlessness norms and standards to which employees are expected to conform. Pubic hair removal may be a part of this occupational requirement, such as medical procedures, which may dictate temporary hairlessness requirements, influencing a person's decision to continue the practice.

Thus, I believe that for many, pubic hair removal and body hair removal might serve to create a more visually appealing surface aesthetic (or the perception of this). Further, ideas about an increase in tactility and sensuality from depilated skin is also evidenced by the interest in erotic removal practices. The sheer amount of pornography that features hairless genitals is also representative of this category. Additionally, a subcategory of fetishes involving hairy or hairless genitals (and bodies in general) also exists as does a genre which focuses on the act of removal as erotic, not the end result. I can also imagine hygiene and cleanliness as reasons for the removal of body hair, stemming from aggressive product marketing, suggesting "smooth" bodies are "clean" bodies. The term *clean* is increasingly utilized to represent shaven or hairless skin, illustrated in sayings like "clean-shaven face" or "I like to keep my hair cleaned up," in place of saying trimmed or shaved.

Further, I query: what if the pleasure of hairless skin opens up new avenues of touch, tactilely altering one's experience of one's own skin and the skin of others? The hair removal process itself, whether done individually or interpersonally (as in partner shaving), could also be seen as enjoyable (or painful, time-consuming, and so on) as it is a time people set aside and devote to their bodies. When persons run the razor along the curves of their legs or pubic area, they are more aware of shape, lines, textures, and sensations of the act - further contributing to embodied knowing. The nature of touch and the concept of skin are interrelated, for it is through skin and touch that close connections are made between sensations and feelings of pleasure and displeasure - desire and disgust.

Depilated skin can become a prime site of encounter with other bodies. This preferential and relational approach to pubic hair is an important factor in those to whom we are attracted and who are attracted to us. Fortunately, considerable diversity in body hair styling practice exists; therefore, people can and have set preferences that conflict, contradict, conform, and resist simultaneously. Though many people are also ambivalent or neutral on

the subject, preference is a major consideration in one's decision to "do" their pubic hair in a certain way. I believe that each person assigns very different meanings to his or her pubic styling practices. Regardless of whether a person participates in pubic styling due to sensory, aesthetic, hygiene/cleanliness, fashion, or sexual reasoning, these practices are in a constant state of flux and are not fixed but open to new ideas, trends, and meanings created in relational contexts.

Because I believe that an individual experiences multiple identities and modes of body-imaging, all of which are relationally-situated, further influenced, and often changing throughout one's life course, it seems extremely difficult to establish any one framework for understanding an individual's motivation for removing or retaining body hair. The body, as a project, is always in a state of becoming something else. It is unfinished and constantly being altered in negotiation or interactions with others as well as the cultural space in which it operates. Our imagining of our bodies, and therefore ourselves, does not exist in isolation from the social forces, practices, and pressures that surround us. It is not a bounded or closed entity unable to transform or change when confronted with new ideas or information.

In the spirit of full frontal disclosure, I would like to add another confession: *I prefer partners who also remove their pubic hair.* While I would never discontinue seeing someone who did not share this preference, I find the allure of shaved or waxed skin more aesthetically and tactilely pleasurable. Further, individuals may embrace different constructions for the meaning they apply to their pubic hair removal and styling practices based on the relationships in which they are engaged. For example, a person might cite a different reason for removal or non-removal to a partner versus a friend versus a medical practitioner, and so on. Each of these interactions create body stories that construct an individual differently, suggesting to me that the landscape of the body is constantly being negotiated, based on shifting histories, preferences, and desired relational outcomes (see Manning & Kunkel, 2014). Thus, it is extremely difficult for anyone to ascertain which relational identity is telling the story and situating the meaning for removal and styling practices. For one individual, it might be fashion, while for another, sensation; some might see this as combating aging, while others see it as creating a childlike appearance; yet another will cite hygiene or cleanliness; one might also state that it is seasonal, habitual, experimental, or a requirement, depending on the persons with whom they are talking and the context in which the interaction occurs. This discourses-in-practice perspective (Gubrium & Holstein, 2009; Manning & Kunkel, 2014) draws from Foucault (1978) to add context to relational meaning.

While dominant ideologies and beauty imagery may provide the most likely model or reference in establishing "norms" surrounding pubic styling and removal practices, how we perceive, evaluate or negotiate, and even create our bodies is an on-going interpretatively-situated, relational negotiation. As a stay-at-home-sweat-pants-wearing-academic-who-is-too-busy-writing-this-paper-to-go-out-on-a-Saturday-night-person-who-advocates-feminism-because-I-am-passionate-about-exploring-spaces-of-embodied-critical-consciousness-while-still-sometime -waxing-or-shaving-my-pubic-hair, I want to believe that individuals *can* and

do display critical consciousness in their decisions to resist or conform to hairlessness norms, especially decisions related to pubic hair styling. Critical consciousness is one means by which conventional femininities and masculinities may be resisted and more flexible and embodied ways of bodily-being are adopted.

I recognize that beauty ideals and body norms related to hair removal are largely influenced by social pressure, seeking to maintain the "body beautiful"; however, I also recognize that individuals have the ability to both conform and resist these norms by participating in some removal practices and not others. As a result, there is no doubt that an individual's body thus becomes a site of conflicted meaning that can only be understood by considering everyday practices and stories related to how, when, and why certain areas of body hair are removed or retained. In considering this, I feel we can begin to also move away from reducing hair removal practices to being simply trivial or time-consuming, which further avoids designating the people who practice it as passive victims or cultural dupes.

In agreement with Tiggemann and Hodgson 2008,[20] I also maintain that attitudes and perceptions regarding pubic hair deviate considerably from "gendered" body hair associations,[21] in that pubic hair does not always conform to the same standards, ideals, or associations as other body hair areas and blurs the gender lines- entangling itself more in the realm of erotic preference and embodied sensuality. Additionally, while pubic hair styling practices are definitely increasing in popularity within the United States, pubic hairstyles are diverse and styles will vary by person and can change throughout one's life, partnered situation, or personal preference.

Situating pubic hair styling practices within this framework allows space for resistance, in that resistance can be situated as "a self-reflective method for adopting, and potentially subverting, one discourse over another" (Evans et al., 2010, p. 127). Taking this approach creates space to avoid the trap of dichotomous thinking such as either/or, good/bad, nature/culture, masculine/feminine, remove/retain stance when talking about body hair practices, in that scholars can continue to be critical of the role consumer culture, pornography, and fashion contribute to embodied, individual practice as well as collective or cultural practices and trends, while still recognizing the dialectical tensions between practices that can both empower and disempower, oppress and liberate, or so on.

I believe it is time for us (researchers writing about body hair) to recognize there are multiple body types, techniques, and experiences, as well as plural sexualities and genders, in order to explore, express, and celebrate our commonalities and differences while remaining tolerant of the various ideas, desires, and disgusts of others. I propose that we move towards recognizing that while body modification practices do appear to be universally practiced, we cannot continue to assume that a universal body ideal regarding body hair exists as this notion oversimplifies and underestimates the personal and relational meanings attributed to body hair. We also need to let go of the idea that we can ever return to or locate the human body in its "natural state" - a state untouched by culture. Recognizing plurality in body practices, as well as the socially constructed, historically situated "nature" of these body projects, is *entirely* open to interpretation. I hope we can remain critical, while still allowing

space for individuals to make their own meaning regarding the practices with which they engage.

Damn it, I have a final confession to make: *This morning I woke up and decided to shave my pubic hair*. I have not done so in months. I laugh as I type this, realizing that I have not shaved my underarms or legs in weeks. My motivation in removing pubic hair - and the experiences and practices that surround the "hair down there," a troublesome, taken-for- granted, yet worthwhile, research topic - is never fixed, but rather, fluid and malleable, based on new meanings and interpretations that shift as I move through my life.

Before we jump to hasty generalizations regarding who engages in this practice, when, and for what reasons, I suggest we take another deep breath and remember that individuals choose to engage in pubic hair styling for a variety of reasons, and it is worth listening to their stories regarding their body projects. Of course, it is important to remain critical of beauty images and practices, especially regarding the social consequences that can result from deviating from a beauty *norm*. Equally important, I believe, is reminding others who state (or write) that waxing (or shaving and styling) is "*never* going to be a feminist act" (Armstrong, 2010) or that "while women are provided with a myriad of options regarding hair removal products and techniques, one fundamental choice is not available to them -- the choice *not* to remove their body hair" (Labre, 2002, p. 27) that the more salient point is "that feminism isn't about what choice you make, but the freedom to make that choice" (Baumgardener & Richards, 2003, p. 450). These choices are always gendered, raced, classed, sexualized and historically situated, culturally specific, contextual, and created relationally through social interaction.

Ultimately, it is my hope that in the process of being critical about body hair "choices," we can be a little more compassionate in considering the variety of reasons why individuals make the decisions they make - in relationship to overarching cultural structures as well as the interpersonal social networks to which they belong. As researchers, we also need to be critical of the research choices we make in discussing body hair practices. When our speculations become stories of "truth" and "fact," rather than beliefs built from shared definitions or agreed upon acts, which constitute social realities via everyday communication practices, we limit ourselves to generalizations rather than the complexities inherent in these categories of practice. Further, more important than the categories themselves is what these categories do socially. In other words, in making specific claims about pubic hair, we should be willing to live within our own categories of these claims or as Bartesaghi (2013) states, "according to our own theoretical creations."

If we are not willing to do so, we should not ask others to live within these created worlds. Personally, I want to live in a world of questions, and in my opinion, "Believing we have found the truth is a way to end it. But believing that we might be happening on some important questions and that we are willing to see them through is what makes the conversation worth continuing" (Bartesaghi, 2013, p. 111). What I have learned in my quest so far is that this debate is a touchy subject, leaving me with more questions and fewer answers regarding the social boundaries of the hair down there. The only matter I do feel certain about is that we need to continue the conversation, recognizing that the discourses we

construct and of which we are a part, have embodied consequences. Thus, in setting out to have a conversation with you about public hair styling and why it is important to think and talk about, considering why some people might engage in this practice, and how we can (re)evaluate how this practice is framed, I invite you to live in a world of questions, too, not seeking to be an expert on the hair down there but instead to be a critical researcher who hopes to keep the conversation going.

Notes

1 The concept "critical consciousness" was coined by Brazilian educator Paulo Freire in the 1960s and was originally applied to his understandings of adult education. "Critical consciousness" includes the ability to think and reflect critically about the world around you, understand causal relationships, create some insight into historical processes, and to be able to translate these insights into action.

2 Throughout this paper and in certain instances, I use the pronoun "we" when discussing body hair in the same sense as William Ian Miller's (1997) concept of an "invitational we." Miller's "we" serves "as a voice of attempted sympathy and imagination, of a mediational position of extrapolating from others' and my [Miller's] own observations of the various traditions that have gone into constructing our broad understandings..." (p. xiii).

3 I jokingly contend that *pubic relations* work includes methods, activities, or techniques aimed at establishing, promoting, modifying, or maintaining a relationship with your pubic region and the pubic region of others. This could also apply to discussions and debates surrounding pubic region modification practices.

4 While this online quiz is no longer available, I include it to highlight how preferences surrounding pubic hair styling have been presented in a popular cultural context. Web. 23 November 2011. http://www.bliss.philips.com/quiz.cfm.

5 For the purpose of this essay, following Reicher and Koo (2004), I define "agency" as the capacity to participate in the creation of social meaning.

6 Currently, teen health advice sites like kidshealth.org, virtualteen.org, and goaskalice.columbia.edu regularly feature information about pubic hair removal.

7 "The overemphasis on danger runs the risk of making speech about sexual pleasure taboo. Feminists are easily intimidated by the charge that their own pleasure is selfish, as in political rhetoric which suggests that no women is entitled to talk about sexual pleasure while any woman remains in danger - that is- never. Some also believe that sexuality is a privileged topic, important only to affluent groups, so to talk of it betrays bad manners and bad politics on the part of sexual betters toward the deprived, who reputedly are only interested in issues that are concrete, material, and life-saving, as if sexuality were not all of these" (Vance, 1992, p. 7).

8 Areas that may be classified as "superfluous" hair include: face (hairline, eyebrow, nose, chin and upper lip), body (underarm, back, shoulder, chest/breasts, abdomen, buttocks, pubic region, thighs, arms and hands, legs and toes).

9 People's participation regarding pubic styling practices in America within the last 15-20 years has occurred alongside shifts related to pornography's transition into the mainstream, the expansion of consumer cultures, media and information technologies, and finally, changes in fashion and the role of beauty culture and its industries.

10 Home Box Office®, a television programming subsidiary of Time Warner®. *Sex and the City's* original programming run occurred between 1998-2004 and is considered one of HBO's most successful series, winning multiple Emmy and Golden Globe awards.

[11] l quotes from the *Sex and the City* episodes came from direct observation by the author.

[12] McNair (2002) uses the term "porno-chic" to denote the representation of pornography into non-pornographic arts and culture.

[13] Jocely, Jonice, Joyce, Janea, Juracy, Judseia, and Padilha, as teenagers, began working in a family-run salon in Victoria, Brazil, now visited by over 300 clients a day in their New York salon.

[14] Though many hair removal specialists define Brazilian waxing in different ways, it is generally accepted that it means to remove all but a medium-width vertical strip or small triangle of pubic hair. All hair is removed from the labia, scrotum, and anal area.

[15] J Sisters. Web. 1 August 2007. http://www.jsisters.com

[16] Jeffreys (2005) also contends that Western cultural beauty practices should be included in the United Nations concept of harmful cultural practices, considering the shaving and waxing of women's genitals as part of men's pornographic imagination, and as such, is only practiced to please one's male partner. She further contends that women who routinely choose to remove pubic hair are attempting to imitate porn stars, most often depicted as having smooth, hairless vulvas.

[17] However, it has become apparent in recent years that there has been a huge rise in men's participation in body hair removal practices (Boroughs, 2005; Hildebrandt, 2003; Ramsey et al., 2009; Tiggemann and Hodgson, 2008).

[18] To examine a range of body hair research studies many of which focus on pubic hair specifically, please refer to Boroughs et al., 2005; Martins, Tiggemann, & Churchett, 2008; Riddell, Varto, & Hodgson, 2010; Herbenick et al., 2010; Schick, Rima, & Calabrese, 2o11; Smolak & Murnen, 2011; Braun et al., 2013; DeMaria & Berenson, 2013; Fahs, 2013, 2014.

[19] Obviously, this is an overly simple explanation of the historical and cultural significance of body hair removal. To explore some historical discussions regarding this topic, however, I recommend you refer to Leach, 1958; Hallpike, 1969; Firth, 1973; Hershman, 1974, Synnott, 1987; Endres, 2004.

[20] Unlike other areas of body hair removal/non-removal, tending to follow more normative associations and gendered stereotypes, pubic hair appears to be in a category of its own when it comes to body hair (Tiggemann and Hodgson, 2008). Individuals have myriad ideas regarding the role of hygiene, sexuality, nakedness, and appearance/body image within social settings, evidencing different interests, partner preferences, and willingness to participate in pubic hair removal in a variety of contexts. How, when, and why each individual participated in pubic hair removal shifted according to relationship status, time-constraints, or current interest in the practice itself. Pubic hair removal was further described as being part of one's creative expression as well as being visually appealing (both removed or not).

[21] For in-depth discussions surrounding the gendering of body hair, please refer to Hope, 1982; Ferrante, 1988; Basow, 1991; Basow & Braman, 1998; Tiggemann & Kenyon, 1998; Herzing, 1999, 2000; Kitzinger & Willmott, 2002; Hildebrandt, 2003; Toerin and Wilkinson, 2003, 2004; Tiggemann and Lewis, 2004; Lesnik-Oberstein, 2006; Hansen, 2007; Fahs, 2013, 2014.

References

Armstrong, J. (2010). Our poor vaginas. *Sirens Magazine.* (http://sexyfeminist.com/2010/10/19/our-poor-vaginas/) Accessed: February 6, 2011.

Attwood, F. (2005). Fashion and passion: Marketing sex to women. *Sexualities*, *8*(4), 392-406.

Attwood, F. (2006). Sexed up: Theorizing the sexualization of culture. *Sexualities,* (*9*)1, 77-94.

Attwood, F. (Ed.) (2009). *Mainstreaming sex*: *The sexualization of Western culture*. London: I.B. Tauris.

Balsamo, A. (1996). *Technologies of the gendered body: Reading cyborg women.* Durham: Duke University Press.

Barcan, R. (2004). *Nudity: A cultural anatomy*. Oxford and New York: Berg Publishers.
Bartesaghi, M. (2013). Qualitative research: Mapping an ongoing journey. *Journal of Medicine and the Person, 12,* 108-113.
Bartky, S. L. (1997). Foucault, femininity and the modernization of patriarchal power. In K. Conboy, N. Medina, & S. Stanbury (Eds.), *Writing on the body: Female embodiment and feminist theory* (pp.129-54). New York: Columbia University Press.
Basow, S. (1991). The hairless ideal: Women and their body hair. *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, *15*, 83-96.
Basow, S., & Braman, A. (1998). Women and body hair: Social perceptions and attitudes. *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, 22, 637-45.
Baumgardner, J., & Richards, A. (2003). The number one question about feminism. *Feminist Studies, 29*(2), 448-452.
Black, P. (2004). *The beauty industry: Gender, culture, pleasure.* London and New York: Routledge.
Blinne, K. (2008). The bikini brief: To double dip or not is the question. *Les Nouvelles Esthetiques, 23(*10), 44-54.
Blinne, K. (2008). The Bikini brief , part II: The case in question - wax on, wax off. *Les Nouvelles Esthetiques*, *23*(11), 38-50.
Boroughs, M., Cafri, G., & Thompson, J.K. (2005). Male body hair depilation: Prevalence and associated features of body hair removal. *Sex Roles*, 52, 637-644.
Bourdieu P (2004) Gender and symbolic violence. In: N. Scheper Hughes N and P. Bourgois (eds), *Violence in War and Peace: An Anthology* (pp. 339-342). Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, Ltd.
Braun, V. (1999). Breaking a taboo? Talking (and laughing) about the vagina. *Feminism & Psychology*, *9*(3), 367-372.
Braun, V., Tricklebank, G., & Clarke, V. (2013). "It shouldn't stick out from your bikini at the beach": Meaning, gender, and the hairy/hairless body." *Psychology of Women Quarterly, 37*(4), 478-493.
Brownmiller, S. (1984). *Femininity*. New York: Fawcett Columbine, Ballantine Books.
Butler, J. (1997). Performative acts and gender constitution: An essay in phenomenology and feminist theory. In K. Conboy, N. Medina, & S. Stanbury (Eds.), *Writing on the body: Female embodiment and feminist theory* (pp.401-418). New York: Columbia University Press.
Butler, J. (2004). *Undoing gender.* London and New York: Routledge.
Chapkis, W. (1986). *Beauty secrets: Women and the politics of appearance.* Boston: South End Press.
Classen, C. (2005). *The book of touch.* Oxford: Berg Publishers.
Cooley, C.H. (1964). *Human nature and social order.* New York: Schoken Books.
DeMaria, A., & Berenson, A. (2013). "Prevalence and correlates of pubic hair grooming among low-income Hispanic, Black, and White women." *Body Image, 10*(2), 226-231.
Douglas, M. (1966). *Purity and danger.* London: Routledge.
Duits, L. & Zoonen, L. v. (2007). Who's afraid of female agency? A rejoinder to Gill. *European Journal of Women's Studies*, *14(*2), 161-170.
Duits, L. & Zoonen, L. v. (2006). Headscarves and porno-chic: Disciplining girls' bodies in the European multicultural society. *European Journal of Women's Studies*, *13* (2), 103-117.
Eagleton, T. (2003). *After theory*. New York: Basic Books.
Endres, J. (2004). Diderot, Hogarth, and the aesthetics of depilation. *Eighteenth-Century Studies, 38*, 1, 17-38.
Evans, A., Riley, S., & Shankar, A. (2010). Technologies of sexiness: Theorizing women's engagement in the sexualization of culture. *Feminism & Psychology*, *20*(1), 114-131.
Fahs, B. (2013). "Perilous patches and pitsaches: Imagined versus lived experiences of women's body hair growth." *Psychology of Women Quarterly, 38(*2), 167-180.
Fahs, B. (2014). "Genital panics: Constructing the vagina in narratives about pubic hair, menstrual sex, and vaginal self-image." *Body Image, 11*(3), 210-218.
Falk, P. (1995). Written in the flesh. *Body & Society, 1*(1), 95-105.
Ferrante, J. (1988). Biomedical versus cultural constructions of abnormality: The case of idiopathic hirsutism in the United States. *Culture, Medicine and Psychiatry* 12, 219-238.
Firth, R. (1973). *Symbolism: Public and private*. London: Allen & Unwin.
Foucault, M. (1977). *Discipline and punish: The birth of the prison*. New York: Vintage.
Foucault M (1978) *The history of sexuality: An Introduction, Volume 1.* New York: Vintage.
Gergen, K. J. (2009). *Relational being: Beyond self and community.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.
Gill, R. (2007). Critical respect: The difficulties and dilemmas of agency and 'choice' forfeminism. *European Journal of Women's Studies*, *14*(1), 69-80.
Greer, G. (1970). *The female eunuch*. London: MacGibbon and Kee.

Grosz, E. (1994). *Volatile bodies: Toward a corporeal feminism*. St. Leonards, NSW: Allen & Unwin.
Gubrium, J. F., & Holstein, J. A. (2009). *Analyzing narrative reality*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
Hallpike, C.R. (1969). Social hair. *Man: The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, 4, 256-264.
Hansen, K. (2007). Hair or bare? The history of American women and hair removal, 1914-1934. Unpublished thesis, American Studies, Barnard College, Columbia University.
Herbenick, D., Schick, V., Reece, M., Sanders, S., & Fontenberry, J. D. (2010). Pubic hair removal among women in the United States: Prevalence, methods, and characteristics. *Journal of Sexual Medicine*, 7, 3322-3330.
Hershman, P. (1974). Hair, sex and dirt. *Man: The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, 9, 274-98.
Herzig, R. (1999). Removing roots "North American Hiroshima Maidens" and x ray. *Technology and Culture*, *40*(4), 723-745.
Herzig, R. (2000). The woman beneath the hair: Treating hypertrichosis, 1870-1930, *National Women's Studies Association Journal*, *12*(3), 50-66.
Hildebrandt, S. (2003). The last frontier: Body norms and hair removal practices in contemporary America. In H. Tschachler, M. Devine, & M. Draxlbauer (Eds.), *The embodyment of American culture* (pp. 59-71). New Brunswick, NJ and London: Transaction Publishers.
Hope, C. (1982). Caucasian female body hair and American culture. *Journal of American Culture*, 5, 93-99.
Jeffreys, S. (2005). *Beauty and misogyny: Harmful cultural practices in the West*. London and New York: Routledge. Kipnis, L. (1992). "(Male) desire and (female) disgust: Reading *Hustler.* In L. Grossberg, C. Nelson, & P. Treichler (Eds.), *Cultural Studies* (pp. 373-392). New York: Routledge.
Kitzinger, C. & Willmott, J. (2002). 'The thief of womanhood': Women's experiences of polycystic ovarian syndrome. *Social Science and Medicine*, *54*, 349-61.
Labre, M.P. (2002). The Brazilian wax: New hairlessness norm for women? *Journal of Communication Inquiry*, *26*(2), 113-132.
Landrum, G. (2003). *Entrepreneurial genius: The power of passion.* Naples, FL: Brendan Kelly Publishing, Inc.
Leach, E. R. (1958). Magical hair. *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland*, *88*, 147-164.
Lesnik-Oberstein, K., ed. (2006). *The last taboo: Women and body hair.* Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press.
Manning, J., & Kunkel, A. (2014). *Researching interpersonal relationships: Qualitative methods, studies, and analysis.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
Martins, Y., Tiggemann, M., & Churchett, L. (2008). Hair today, gone tomorrow: A comparison of body removal practices in gay and heterosexual men. *Body Image,* 5, 312-316.
Macdonald, A. (2006). Hair on lens: Female body hair on the screen. In K. Lesnik-Oberstein (Ed.), *The last taboo: Women and body hair.* Manchester: Manchester University Press.
McNair, B. (2002). *Striptease culture*: *Sex, media and the democratisation of desire.* London and New York: Routledge.
Miller, W. I. (1997). *The anatomy of disgust.* Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press.
Morris, D. (1967, 1999). *The naked ape: A zoologist's study of the human animal.* New York: A Delta Book.
Plummer, K. (1993). *Intimate citizenship: Private decisions and public dialogues*. Seattle & London: University of Washington Press.
Ramsey, S., Sweeney, C., Fraser, M. & Oades, G. (2009). Pubic hair and sexuality: A review. *Journal of Sexual Medicine*, *6*, 2102-2110.
Reischer, E., & Koo, K.S. (2004). The body beautiful. Symbolism and agency in the social world. *Annual Review of Anthropology, 33*, 297-317.
Riddell, L., Varto, H., & Hodgson, Z.G. (2010). "Smooth talking: The phenomenon of pubic hair removal in women." *The Canadian Journal of Human Sexuality,* (http://sexualityandu.ca/uploads/files/CTR_PubicHairRemoval_APR2012-EN.pdf). Accessed January 16, 2015.
Schick, V. R., Rima, B. N., & Calabrese, S. K. (2011). E*vulva*lution: The portrayal of women's external genitalia and physique across time and the current Barbie doll ideals. *Journal of Sex Research, 48*, 1, 74-81.
Sharp, L. (2000). The commodification of the body and its parts. *Annual Review of Anthropology*, *29*, 287-328.
Shilling, C. (2003). *The body in social theory,* 2nd ed. London and Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
Smolak, L., & Murnen, S. (2011)."Gender, self-objectification and pubic hair removal." *Sex Roles*, *65*(7-8), 506- 517.
Synnott, A. (1987). Shame and glory: A sociology of hair. *The British Journal of Sociology*, *38*(3), 381-413.
Tiggemann, M. & Kenyon, S. (1998). The hairlessness norm: The removal of body hair in women. *Sex Roles*, *39*, 873-85.
Tiggemann, M. & Lewis, C. (2004). Attitudes toward women's body hair: Relationship with disgust sensitivity. *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, *28*, 381-387.
Tiggemann, M. & Hodgson, S. (2008). The hairlessness norm extended: Reasons for and predictors of women's body hair removal at different body sites. *Sex Roles, 59*, 889-897.
Toerien, M. & Wilkinson S. (2003). Gender and body hair: Constructing the feminine woman. *Women's Studies International Forum*, *26*(4), 333-344.

Toerien, M., & Wilkinson, S. (2004). “Exploring the Depilation Norm: A qualitative questionnaire study of women’s body hair removal.” *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 1.1, 69-92.

Toerien, M., Wilkinson, S., & Choi, P. (2005). Body hair removal: The 'mundane' production of normative femininity. *Sex Roles*, *52*, 399-406.

Trager, J. (2006). Pubic hair removal - pearls and pitfalls. *Journal of Pediatric Adolescent Gynecology, 19*, 117-123. Vance, C. (1992). Pleasure and danger: Toward a politics of sexuality. In: C. Vance (Ed.), *Pleasure and Danger: Exploring Female Sexuality* (pp. 1-27). London: Pandora.

Walsh, S. (2006). Bikini fur and fur bikinis. In K. Lesnik-Oberstein (Ed.), *The last taboo: Women and body hair 25*(pp. 166-180). Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press.